

Testimony submitted to the Judiciary Committee
By Melissa Spear
In Support of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination
March 21, 2011

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, Members of the Judiciary Committee,

This is not the first time I have testified before many of you but it is without doubt the most important testimony I have ever delivered - because today it is personal. Today I am testifying as the mother of a beautiful transgender son. My son Skylar is 15. He has brains to spare, and uses them to get straight As. His teachers love him because he is respectful, intellectually curious and hardworking. He is kind and generous to his friends. He loves his dog and the band OK Go. His room generally looks like a bomb went off in it and like most teenagers he can be at times absolutely exasperating. In fact, at this point in his life he finds pretty much anything I have to say somewhat annoying (but I love him anyway). He is well on the way to becoming a productive member of our society, and is excited to think about what contribution he will make to the world.

Every parent fears for their children as they prepare to venture out into the world – but those of us with transgender children unfortunately have good reason to fear. It is not just that our children will have to deal with people who choose not to understand them, are intolerant of them, and often even hostile toward them because of who they are. It is that our children - my child - is growing up in a society that does not extend to him the same protections against discrimination that are extended to almost every other person in this room. My child can be fired or kept out of a job, denied housing, be turned away from public accommodations, be refused membership in a professional organization, all without recourse, all based not on what he does or does not do, but simply because of WHO HE IS.

If discrimination based on gender identity did not actually ever occur it would be easy to sit here and say that perhaps HB 6599 is unnecessary. But in fact, as many of you heard in testimony delivered in 2005 and again in 2007, and I am sure again today, transgender people are very actively and egregiously discriminated against. I worry every day that this is the world I am about to send my son into. But with your help we can take an important step toward making the world a better place not just for my son but for ALL people by ending this type of discrimination. That is why I am here today: not just to urge you, but to plead with you to support HB 6599. It is pretty simple today to say that passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prevents discrimination on the basis of sex or race was the right thing to do. I can assure you that extending those same basic protections to my child and all transgender children is also absolutely the right thing to do. It is not only the right thing to do; it is the moral and ethical thing to do. It is in the best interest of our society. It will be a powerful expression of our humanity. These children, many of whom have displayed the utmost courage in the face of bullying, harassment, humiliation, and even physical assault in order to remain true to themselves don't just deserve the rights this bill would grant them – they are entitled to them. Please don't let them – or my son down. We are all counting on you.